2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Aweikoma

in the middle of the night and finds himself without food may, if he is brazen enough, get up, and while the owner is asleep, eat the leg of his howler monkey or the rib of his tapir. He must keep his tongue between his teeth, for to refuse food is the most frightful sin the Kaingáng can imagine. *Ndegn*, to refuse, has such an aura of destructive affect about it that every time I heard it it chilled my blood. To hear *ndegn* applied to food is to expect murder around the corner. In times of plenty it does not matter how much meat a man has; in times of hunger food passes through his fingers like water. Still, with all this each of the Kaingáng likes to take the biggest piece even when game is scarce. For one or two days the bellies of his children will be full, but soon the meat is all gone.

This possessive feeling about food applies with somewhat greater intensity to pine nuts. These are often gathered by a man and his wife. He climbs the tree and jumps around on the boughs until he dislodges the great five-pound cones; and then he descends and helps his wife gather them up and break them open to extract the nuts. They fill their yard-deep baskets, and what they cannot use immediately they bury in stream beds to preserve them. The theft of a full unburied basket is rare—I know of only one case—but the theft of nuts from the preservation beds is quite common. The nonchalance of the Kaingáng about these thefts is perplexing to the ethnologist steeped in the traditions of western culture and trained to expect conflicts after theft. Nevertheless I never knew the theft of a basket of nuts to create more than a one-day grumble. Indians would protest to me about property people had stolen, and they would tell me in no uncertain language what they thought of such people, but they never did anything about it. It is not possible to formulate precisely the movements of food in Kaingáng society. When one has said that the primary emphasis is on giving to affinal relatives, to parents and siblings, to hunting companions, and to the friends whom one has inherited from one's father, everything has been said that can be about the structuralization of food distribution.

Kaingáng property arrangements are not a matter of checks and balances which ensure that for every piece of meat which A gives to B he may expect a piece in return. It is impossible to make them understand any theory of exchange other than that of outright purchase which they have learnt from the whites. I tried in vain to make them understand that when I lent them a scythe to clear their fields they should give me a little corn when it became green. Their understanding of reciprocity is in terms of lifelong symbiosis, not in terms of balanced exchanges. No accounts are kept, but in the back of his mind each man knows who has been systematically helpful to him and who not. Many of the conflicts within the extended families arise out of some failure to live up to the ideal of constant